Book Review: Secret ingredients: race, gender and class at the dinner table

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is no match for the formal elegance and temporal force carried by the image of its replacement *going up*.

Where is the use of images in public culture headed, particularly given the radical transformation in availability and circulation brought about by the web? The authors see positive signs of a fracturing of institutionally managed iconicity by the newer 'circuits of appropriation' that the web allows. However, they note how 'public spectatorship is exercised primarily through the experience of looking at images of a public world of actors, actions and events' (p. 299) and they carry their sense of the eloquence and indispensability of photographs as public documents through to their final discussion of the 'visual public sphere'. Here, some work with how their selected images are currently perceived in the classroom and among different groups of Americans might have been a wonderful, if necessarily impressionistic and refracted, complement to their own careful, historical readings. They might have also said more about the relationships with television, still the dominant public medium and with a steady supply of pictures and sounds that contrast interestingly, both in their aesthetics and in their political profile, with the still and mute images of photography. They are mostly more hopeful than convincing about how the 'liberal' dimension of contemporary political culture – individualizing, consumer-oriented and often resistant to the kind of appeal to community that many of the photographs they discuss exerted when first published – might be reconnected back with 'democratic' public values.

But this is an admirable study. Among other things, it might prompt more academic interest in the current politics of photography internationally. What kinds of 'iconicity' do we see at work now? To what purposes are they being put? To pick up on the book's own concluding discussion: How important is the production and circulation of static images for democratic political development today?

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Sherrie A. Inness, *Secret Ingredients: Race, Gender and Class at the Dinner Table*. New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. 246 pp. ISBN 1403970084 (hbk) $45.00

Secret Ingredients contributes to a growing body of work that demonstrates how cookbooks are not simply guides about how to cook, but also how to live. As such, cookbooks offer valuable resources for researching hidden cultural, as well as culinary, histories. In this book, Inness aims to provide a corrective to the scholarship on cookbooks which focuses on how these works play a role in reproducing gender inequalities. Indeed, she admits that the book also provides a corrective to some of her own earlier work

in which she argued that cookbooks represented cooking as a creative, feminine activity that produced happy and healthy homes, husbands and children (which Inness called 'the cooking mystique'). Rather than assuming that cookbooks reproduce 'socially conservative and traditional' gender roles, in this book she sets out to demonstrate how they can also be 'transgressive' and promote 'social and political change' (pp. 3–4).

Inness aims to demonstrate how cookbooks have challenged dominant ideas about 'race', class and gender, have given a voice to groups who have frequently been marginalized from many other forms of public expression, and have acted as a means of articulating forms of political protest. She finds a proto-second-wave feminist voice in literature on convenience foods in the 1950s and Peg Bracken's *I Hate to Cook* books of the early 1960s. In other chapters, Inness focuses on 'race'. She examines how Chinese-American cookbooks of the 1950s educated the American public about Chinese culture and history during the period of the 'red scare' and helped to reduce 'the gap between the East and West' (p. 48). Likewise, she explores how more recent cookbooks have contributed to building awareness of a marginalized African-American cultural history and how cooking practices helped to produce a black domestic culture that operated as a source of strength and community against the injuries of racism. Further chapters consider: women's role in the politicization of cooking in the natural foods movement; the ways in which 'white trash' foods challenge cultural and culinary hierarchies; recent representations of veganism which challenge mainstream culinary habits; and the allegedly 'revolutionary' impact of the calorie-loving and corpulent *Two Fat Ladies* and their eponymous television show 'on millions of women' (p. 170). In the process, Inness develops some useful ideas: for example, she challenges the elitism that characterizes some work within food studies, demonstrating how convenience foods, labour-saving kitchen appliances and 'white trash' recipes such as 'Twinkie pie' are not as inherently valueless as some food critics and health educationalists have suggested.

One of the key problems with this 'corrective' approach is that the book lacks a sufficient sense of complexity. In her earlier work, cookbooks were interesting but also condemned as 'bad' because they reproduce 'traditional' gender inequalities; here, cookbooks are both interesting and 'good' because they challenge established social and cultural inequalities. It might have been more useful to think about the complexity and contradictions of cookbooks within one volume. This is particularly problematic where the politics of class, gender and 'race' cut across each other in contradictory ways. For example, the discussion of *Two Fat Ladies* claims that the show is progressive in terms of its gender politics but pays little attention to the ways in which the culinary tradition the ladies draw on is tied to a particularly classed and colonial form of Britishness. Likewise, there is very little attention paid to veganism as a class practice and, while whiteness is an issue in the discussion of 'white trash', it becomes largely invisible in

the discussion of the white middle-class. This tendency towards a rather simplistic analysis is also partly a result of a fondness for sweeping statements: for example, 'This reflects a society in which the ultimate sin is for women to grow fat' (p. 170).

In other places, Inness does acknowledge that things may not be as clear-cut as they appear. She observes how the natural foods movement was beyond the economic and temporal means of most people but never interrogates how counter-cultural food practices were class practices that had their own specific logic (as Sam Binkley, 2007, has so well illustrated in his recent work). In the same chapter, she very briefly ponders the apparent contradictions of the gender politics of the natural foods movement, observing that 'there was a potentially conservative aspect of situating women again in the kitchen' but also 'a revolutionary aspect' in the invitation to 'adopt an active role in changing one's community and the world' (p. 103). This is frustrating because there is fascinating history to be written about the complex relations between feminism, femininity, the counter-culture and the new middle classes, but the book does little more than gesture towards it.

Nonetheless, Inness has constructed an interesting and engaging cultural history that makes a useful contribution to our knowledge of cookbooks and US culinary history. The book is also written with an admirable level of clarity and should be accessible to a non-academic audience. But this places limits on what the book has to say to an audience looking for a more theorized understanding of food cultures. The book is heavily dependent on the 'images of …' tradition of media analysis, and is mainly concerned with identifying the 'messages' in cookbooks. It is here that the book is likely to frustrate people working in cultural studies: while Deleuze is not necessary – or even desirable – in order to analyse *How to Have the Most Fun with Cake Mixes*, a more nuanced theoretical framework might have enabled the author to look at the contradictory nature of cultural forms in a more complex way.

Reference

Binkley, S. (2007) *Getting Loose: Lifestyle Consumption in the 1970s*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

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Rajinder Kumar Dudrah, *Bollywood: Sociology Goes to the Movies*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2006. 212 pp. ISBN 9780761934615 (pbk) £19.99

This ambitious volume purports to explore the dynamics, possibilities and tensions inherent in the workings of cinema as a global industry. It is not